

## Tips for Developing a Successful PSA Lead Trainer Application

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The purpose of this fact sheet is to outline the criteria for submitting a Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) Lead Trainer Application and to share tips to help applicants develop a successful application. Having qualified lead trainers is critical to ensuring that each PSA Grower Training participant receives a quality experience that provides them with information they need to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule (PSR) regulatory requirements.

PSA Lead Trainer applicants are evaluated on their educational background, training experience, on-farm experience, and their ability to demonstrate competency in the following four knowledge areas:

1. Produce safety scientific knowledge and experience
2. Fruit and vegetable production knowledge
3. Effective training delivery
4. Knowledge of the FSMA Produce Safety Rule

It is important for applicants to carefully consider these requirements and review their qualifications before they submit a PSA Lead Trainer Application and pay the application fee.



### Applying to Become a PSA Lead Trainer:

1. Successfully complete a PSA Grower Training Course
2. Successfully complete a PSA Train-the-Trainer Course
  - At this point you will be a PSA Trainer
3. Review all the PSA Lead Trainer expectations to ensure you have the necessary experience and qualifications
4. Fill out the PSA Lead Trainer Application

In order to be as objective as possible, reviewers use a standardized rubric to score the PSA Lead Trainer Application. Multiple reviewers are assigned to each application to ensure the evaluation process is fair and impartial. PSA Lead Trainer Applications are declined during the review process when there are deficiencies in foundational experience reported on the PSA Trainer Experience portion and/or in responses given to the four short answer questions. Additional information on the requirements to become a [PSA Lead Trainer](#) and [how applications are scored](#) are posted on the PSA website.

## Assessment of PSA Trainer Experience

### *Training Experience*

The most common deficiency noted in the PSA Trainer Application is a lack of relevant training experience. Gaining additional experience by co-training with PSA Lead Trainers at PSA Grower Trainings is an ideal way to gain training experience while also developing a deeper understanding of the curriculum. It is recommended that PSA Trainers teach each of the PSA Grower Training modules to master the curriculum content before applying to be a PSA Lead Trainer. Co-training also encourages trainers to see things from the grower's point of view. This helps trainers anticipate grower questions, respond to questions in a practical way, and become familiar with implementation challenges that growers face. Teaching other produce safety courses or giving presentations on the PSR are also beneficial experiences, especially in situations where the applicant does not have the opportunity to co-train during a PSA Grower Training Course.



**Expert tip:** Use the [PSA Trainer Directory](#) to find PSA Lead Trainers in your area. Offer to co-train with them or assist with organizing a farm tour to help everyone better understand the PSR.

### *Knowledge of the FSMA PSR*

Applicants must have sufficient knowledge of the PSR. The PSR may be new to some, including those who have been teaching related courses like Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) or Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) for decades. Teaching this new material and answering questions during a training requires trainers to become intimately acquainted with the PSR, how it applies to farms, and the challenges the new requirements present to growers. Trainers often confuse audit requirements (e.g., USDA GAP & GHP, USDA Harmonized GAP) with PSR requirements, so it is also important to understand the PSA Lead Trainer Application is focused on the PSR.

### *On-Farm Experience*

Applicants must have on-farm experience. This experience may result from growing produce commercially, providing outreach or extension to produce growers as an extension educator or industry technician, or through work as a food safety consultant. While this can be more difficult to address for an applicant who is not connected to the farming community, having an in-depth understanding of growing practices is crucial to being able to support growers who are implementing PSR requirements. Some trainers have found unique ways to meet the on-farm experience expectation such as:

- Volunteering to help on a farm for a day in return for a tour of the entire operation
- Volunteering on a university research farm
- Attending university extension on-farm workshops and tours
- Assisting a grower with writing a Farm Food Safety Plan
- Assisting with an On-Farm Readiness Review (OFRR)
- Signing-up for a 'working share' community-supported agriculture (CSA) program
- Helping a grower prepare for an audit or inspection

## Educational Background

Applicants are expected to have an educational background that provides them with an understanding of food safety or fruit and vegetable production knowledge. If an applicant does not have this background, it can be gained by attending university Extension trainings or other food safety- or horticulture-related course offerings. Courses such as ServSafe®, Pesticide Applicator, Certified Crop Advisor, Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) training, and FSMA Training (of any type) can help an applicant build their credentials. A course does not need to be nationally recognized, but the applicant should be able to explain how the course adds to their knowledge of food safety or growing practices.



## Short Answer Questions

The PSA Lead Trainer Application includes short answer questions to evaluate applicant proficiency in the four competency areas: Produce Safety Knowledge and Experience, Fruit and Vegetable Production Knowledge, Effective Training Delivery, and Knowledge of the PSR. Each of these is critical because PSA Lead Trainers bear significant responsibility in assuring that all participants in their PSA Grower Training Courses receive all the required information in the PSA Grower Training Curriculum, whether it is presented by them personally or by another PSA Trainer. The PSA Lead Trainer must also be able to understand grower questions and ensure that responses provided are accurate and relevant so that growers can comply with PSR requirements.

### Keep Responses Relevant to Growers

Many of the short answer questions asked in the PSA Lead Trainer Application are questions growers have asked during PSA Grower Trainings. A successful response demonstrates the applicant's ability to communicate the related PSR requirements, along with GAPS that support the PSR requirements, in a way that a grower would understand. The applicant should demonstrate their ability to explain the content of the PSA Grower Training in their own words (i.e., not copy and paste text from the PSA Grower Training Manual). This may include breaking information down into understandable parts, relating concepts to the overall goal of on-farm food safety, making judgements based on standards and available guidance, and citing the appropriate regulatory provisions. The following recommendations will help an applicant write responses that meet rubric criteria and reduce the likelihood that follow-up will be required to assess an applicant's readiness to become a PSA Lead Trainer.

### Trainer Competency Areas



Produce Safety Scientific Knowledge and Expertise



Fruit and Vegetable Production Knowledge



Effective Training Delivery



Knowledge of the FSMA Produce Safety Rule

- *Answer the questions as if you were responding to a grower.* The PSA Lead Trainer Application is a test of the trainer’s abilities, including both communication skills and knowledge in all four competency areas.
- *Become familiar with each subpart of the PSR so you are prepared to explain all the ‘musts’ to a grower.* Applicants are encouraged to reference the PSR while filling out the short answer questions, especially when the question is directly related to PSR requirements. Think of this like an open-book test – as PSA Trainers, you are encouraged to use available resources including your PSA manual! See the section ‘Stay Up-to-Date’ below for additional FSMA PSR resources.
- *Remember that incorrect ‘recommendations’ can be costly for the grower.* Common mistakes include stating that a Good Agricultural Practice (i.e., a should) is a PSR requirement (i.e., a must), expecting the farm to comply with the requirements of another FSMA rule (e.g., Preventive Controls Rule for Human Food when their operation is not subject to this rule), or suggesting impractical methods to reduce risks.
- *Do not copy and paste or plagiarize.* You may cite other resources, but be sure to draft your response in your own words. It is important to go beyond what the PSA Grower Training Manual says in order to demonstrate your ability to explain the content to course participants.

Each application is evaluated by a committee of produce safety experts. The response to each question on the PSA Lead Trainer Application receives a score of 1, 2, or 3:

1. Below expectations. The applicant explains concepts incorrectly. Application will be declined.
2. Needs further evaluation. The applicant seems to understand basic principles, but has not explained or applied the information as requested. Follow-up required.
3. Meets expectations. The applicant demonstrates the ability to present and explain the content. This may include breaking the information down into parts, relating the parts to the overall picture, and making judgements based on standards.

**Expert tip:** Be familiar with each subpart of the PSR and be able to explain all the ‘musts’ to a grower audience before answering the PSA Lead Trainer Application.

### **Stay Up-to-Date**

PSA Lead Trainers are expected to stay up-to-date with FDA announcements and guidance; therefore, failure to do so could result in an application being declined. As new information is released, it may change answers to some of the questions, so it is very important that applicants read and become familiar with this information. One way to stay up-to-date is by visiting the [FDA webpage on the PSR](#) and by signing up for [FDA email updates](#). This is a good practice since it is imperative the PSA Trainers stay current with any changes affecting PSR compliance. The [PSA Trainer Updates](#) webpage is another resource that can help you stay current with the latest announcements. The PSA shares updates through the PSA Trainer and Lead Trainer listserv and offers regular [Produce Safety Educators Group Calls](#), in English and Spanish, to further facilitate information exchange.

Additional helpful resources on the FSMA PSR include:

- [FSMA PSR Preamble](#) (front material of the regulation) includes FDA responses to comments received on the proposed Rule, clarifies FDA thinking about Rule requirements at the time of publication (2015).
- [Food Safety Resource Clearinghouse](#), a curated source of produce safety resources hosted by the Northeast Center to Advanced Food Safety (NECAFS).
- [FSMA Inflation-Adjusted Cut offs](#), updated by FDA each spring to reflect the inflation-adjusted values for not covered farms and qualified exempt farms.
- [FDA Draft guidance on the FSMA Produce Safety Rule](#) provides updated FDA thinking (2018) about Rule requirements and information about how farms may meet rule requirements.



### **Other Tips**

As you fill out the short answer questions within the PSA Lead Trainer Application, please keep these additional tips in mind:

- *Read the instructions carefully.*
  - Please read the question carefully and provide appropriate scientific references or professional observations to support your answer.
  - Think about the question in the context of the [competency area](#) being evaluated. The reviewers will use your response to evaluate your ability in that competency area. Responses that focus on information that is not relevant to the competency area, even if the response is technically accurate, may result in failure to meet expectations for the response.
  - When in doubt, give responses with examples of how the information can be applied on a farm or by a farmer rather than general or generic information.
  - Responses may not be any longer than 350 words per question. Responses which are longer than 350 words may be declined without review by the committee.
- *Consider working offline to save your work, since you should not trust the webform to save your progress in the application.*
  - Working offline and saving your answers in a document (e.g., a Word document) prior to opening the form will allow you to paste your answers into the form in a streamlined manner.
- *Proofread all responses.* Ensure your responses are accurate and understandable, that they address the questions (and all parts of the questions) and that they demonstrate that you can convey the PSR requirements to growers.
- If you need to navigate to a previous page, do not use the back button on the internet browser. Instead, use the back arrow within the form itself.

**Expert tip:** If English is not your preferred language, consider working with a trusted translator to make sure you understand the English-language questions.

- Write the response in your preferred language and have it translated to English.
- Check to make sure you agree with the translated response before submitting your application.

## Final Steps in the Application Process

- After submitting the PSA Lead Trainer Application, you will be directed to a payment screen.
  - The cost is \$325 for non-profit organizations and \$500 for for-profit organizations. This fee covers the cost of the PSA Lead Trainer Review Committee members' time reviewing and approving applications, as well as any time spent conducting follow-up interviews with applicants (if needed).
  - If you inadvertently submit your responses or experience technological issues during the application process, please contact us immediately at [psatrainers@cornell.edu](mailto:psatrainers@cornell.edu) and we will help you troubleshoot the form. We will not make changes after reviewers have been assigned to your application.
- You will receive a confirmation e-mail from [psatrainers@cornell.edu](mailto:psatrainers@cornell.edu) when the application has been received. Please check your 'junk' or 'spam' folder as occasionally e-mail clients will filter the address into the wrong folder. This is also important to keep in mind while you wait for the committee's decision. If they require clarification or wish to set up an interview, that request will arrive via email.
- Review of applications occurs on a first-come, first-served basis. The PSA cannot provide an estimated timeline for when your application will be reviewed.
  - Do not make arrangements to serve as a PSA Lead Trainer for a PSA Grower Training Course until you have been approved as a PSA Lead Trainer.

We appreciate your interest in becoming a PSA Lead Trainer and the time you have devoted to produce safety outreach. It is critically important to have PSA Lead Trainers located throughout the U.S. and globally so that courses are available for growers who want and need to attend a PSA Grower Training. Thank you for working with us to achieve this goal.

**Are you looking for help gaining more experience or addressing a deficiency noted by the review committee?**

Contact your [PSA Regional Extension Associate](#) or visit the [PSA website](#) for more information.

